

Japanese PM prepares for war

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Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's appeal last week to the example of the Falklands war to justify his tough stance in the island dispute with China is a chilling warning that the fault lines of a new and terrible global conflict are being drawn in Asia.

Abe quoted former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher's cynical rationale for declaring war on Argentina in 1982 that the "the rule of international law must triumph over the exertion of force." She proceeded to send the British military into a bloody conflict that cost hundreds of lives on both sides in order to secure a tiny remnant of the British Empire in the South Atlantic.

Abe's remark is an unmistakable declaration that his government is prepared to go to war with China to defend its control over the group of uninhabited, rocky outcrops in the East China Sea, known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China.

The enormous dangers are obvious. Unlike Argentina, China is a substantial, nuclear-armed power with a large, increasingly sophisticated military. Any armed clash between Japan and China could spiral out of control and draw in other powers, in particular the United States, which has already stated that it would side with Tokyo in a war over the islands.

The chief responsibility for stoking these tensions lies with the Obama administration, which since 2009 has been engaged in a diplomatic and strategic offensive throughout Asia aimed at undermining China as a potential economic and military rival. Obama's "pivot to Asia" has encouraged American allies and strategic partners to take a tougher stand against China, and thus inflamed the region's many potential flash points—including the Korean Peninsula, maritime disputes in the South China Sea, and the unresolved quarrel between India and China over borders.

The worsening global breakdown of capitalism is driving this eruption of militarism. For two decades, American imperialism has engaged in a desperate

attempt to offset its decline through the use of military might. By shifting the focus to Asia, Obama has raised the stakes immeasurably, threatening to set off a conflict between nuclear-armed powers.

Abe, a right-wing nationalist, is pursuing a similar strategy in a bid to end two decades of economic stagnation in which Japan has lost its position as the world's second largest economy to China. He is determined to build "a strong Japan" that can assert the interests of Japanese imperialism through both economic and military means.

The newly elected Abe government is rapidly implementing plans to build up a military unfettered by the country's postwar "pacifist" constitution. At the same time, it has adopted an aggressive monetary policy, like the "quantitative easing" of the US Federal Reserve, to devalue the yen and boost exports at the expense of Japan's rivals.

Abe's reference to the Falklands War contains another ominous warning. Thatcher's decision to launch a war in the South Atlantic was not just aimed at demonstrating British's power on the world stage. It was also directed against what she would later describe as "the enemy within"—the British working class. Having earlier failed to break the resistance of workers to her pro-market agenda, Thatcher used the Falklands War to whip up nationalism and jingoism, with the support of the Labour Party, to prepare for a frontal assault on the working class, culminating in the defeat of the 1984-85 British miners' strike.

Similarly Abe's ambitions for "a strong economy" require an all-out assault on the social position of the Japanese working class. Like its counterparts around the world, the ruling class in Japan is seeking to shift the burden of the worsening global economic breakdown onto its rivals abroad and working people at home. The promotion of Japanese patriotism and militarism, to which the entire political establishment adheres, is the necessary preparation for an attack on

what remains of Japan's system of "life-long employment" and the country's limited welfare state.

The revival of Japanese militarism has profound historic resonances with the pre-war period of the 1930s. Japanese capitalism was particularly vulnerable to the collapse of world trade during the Great Depression. In a bid to gain markets and raw materials, Japanese imperialism launched a war to seize Manchuria in 1931, then invaded China as a whole in 1937. At home, the militarist regime erected an entire system of police-state measures to crush any resistance in the working class to intolerable social conditions.

These are also the historic roots of the deep-seated hostility among workers and youth to Japanese militarism, which finds no expression in any of Japan's political parties. During the election, the entire political establishment—including the Japanese Communist Party—lined up, in one way or another, behind the claims of Japanese imperialism to the Senkaku islands, opening the door for Abe and the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party to come to power.

The Chinese Communist Party regime is resorting to the same methods—stirring up poisonous nationalism to divert attention from the economic crisis and rising social tensions at home. In response to Tokyo's decision last September to "nationalise" the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, Beijing gave the green light for anti-Japanese protests that attacked Japanese citizens and businesses. Chinese media outlets are increasingly dominated by analysts commenting on China's military capacities and speculating on the outcome of an all-out war with Japan.

Not a few political commentators are now referring to the eerie parallels between the current tensions in East Asia and the conflicts in the Balkans that led to World War I. The drift toward a Third World War, whether triggered in Asia or elsewhere in the world, is the product of the irresolvable contradictions of capitalism—between world economy and the outmoded nation state system on the one hand, and private property and socialised production on the other.

The only social force capable of ending the scourge of war is the working class, through a unified struggle to put an end to the historically bankrupt profit system. Workers in Japan and China, and around the globe, have no interest in a conflict over a handful of desolate, rocky outcrops in the East China Sea. Their future lies

in the fight to establish a world planned socialist economy, organised to meet the social needs of the majority of humanity, not the profits of a tiny wealthy elite.

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